

# Soldiers mastery of skills help keep Africans safe

Story and Photo by Lance Cpl. Adam C. Schnell

CAMP LEMONIER, Djibouti – Although the reserve soldiers of 412<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion are 9,000 miles away from their communities, many use their skills as Las Vegas law enforcement officers to improve lives for people in the Horn of Africa.

While in support of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa, they conduct missions to increase stability by cooperating with host villages to help provide clean water, functional schools and improved medical facilities. By increasing stability in the region, it helps make communities safer by denying a safe haven for transnational terrorists in their area.

Despite the obvious differences between working in rural villages in the Horn of Africa and providing law enforcement in Las Vegas, soldiers say there are similarities.

"There are so many skills I use now that I acquired while on patrol," said Army Capt. Joe T. Martin, team leader for the 412<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion, and one of 10 law enforcement officers assigned here.

Martin, a robbery detective in his civilian job, has been in law enforcement for a little more than 13 years. Even though he has performed duties from being an armor officer to his current job as a robbery detective, he said he has learned the most important skills as a patrol officer.

"The ability to talk to people and defuse situations is key to being a good cop and civil affairs member," said Martin.

The Las Vegas native says this because whether in the United States or Africa, being able to communicate and give advice to community leaders about the welfare of their citizens is a valuable skill. As a patrol officer, this skill is honed the most.

"While patrolling, many times officers must go into an unpredictable situation with people they don't know," said Martin.

The methods used to cope with these situations are almost identical to the techniques used when a civil affairs team performs humanitarian assistance in a village. The civil affairs team will provide advice on how to resolve a problem, not solve it for them.

In order to help the communities by providing guidance, a strong sense of trust must be attained. Building trust can be the most difficult part of the civil affairs mission, said Army Maj. Don Cullison,



*Army Capt. Joe T. Martin, a robbery detective in his civilian life, drinks tea with village leaders during a civic action program here Feb. 11. Martin, a team leader for the 412<sup>th</sup> Civil Affairs Battalion, uses skills learned as a patrol officer to better support Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa by building long-lasting relationships with communities in the region.*

executive officer for the company.

"Trust is the number one building block for lasting relationships," said Cullison. "Without it we couldn't do anything here."

Although gaining trust is very hard because of a language barrier, the soldiers take tools learned as civilians and apply them. One thing many members have found useful is just being sincere and showing care for the people in the village.

"It takes forever to gain the community's trust, and a second for them to take it away," said Martin.

After gaining the trust of the community, each team must work with local leaders to see what is needed or wanted to improve the quality of life for the people. Most villages need repairs to either a school or clinic, said Cullison, a sexual abuse detective in his civilian life.

"Working with the communities to improve quality of life is our main goal," said Cullison. "The happier people are the less likely they will be pres-

sured by negative influences like transnational terrorists."

Cullison, who has been in law enforcement for over 10 years, says using this method of being proactive instead of reactive is much like "community-oriented policing." If people take pride in their neighborhood, the community will take care of itself without the need of a strong law enforcement presence.

"We try to solve the small problems at the lowest level, another tool we use in law enforcement in the U.S.," said Cullison.

With almost a dozen soldiers from the civil affairs company in law enforcement, working together is much easier. Many of them worked together before coming to CJTF-HOA and have much of the same training.

"Most of us knew each other before coming out here," said Martin. "So for us it seems like just another day, just in a different place."

## The Horn Courier



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Cover photo by Spc. Eric M. McKeeby

*Soldiers from the Bravo Co., the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment, "The Old Guard," hustle and bounce over trip wires Saturday at an obstacle course at the French Foreign Legion base. Bravo Co. has been deployed here since December in support of Operation Enduring Freedom.*

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